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A P L E A

FOR THE WIDER ACTION OF

The Church of England

IN THE PREVENTION OF

THE DEGRADATION OF WOMEN,

AS SUBMITTED TO A COMMITTEE OF CONVOCATION

ON JULY 3, 1879.

BY

ELLICE HOPKINS,

AUTHOR OF 'WORK IN BRIGHTON,' 'WORK AMONG THE LOST,'
'NOTES ON PENITENTIARY WORK,' ETC.

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PREFACE.

THE greater part of this paper was read at the Annual Conference of the Church Penitentiary Association in May, 1879, and it was afterwards submitted to the Committee of Convocation on Prostitution, on occasion of my being asked to bear evidence, July 3rd, 1879. I can only hope that the deliberations of the Committee appointed by Convocation for grappling with this difficult and terrible problem may result in the formation of some powerful Church organization, which will attack it root and branch, and proclaim the absolute authority, for men and women alike, of those great moral laws on which the welfare and health of nations have most depended. Whether that organization can be developed from an existing one, the Church Penitentiary Association, or whether it had better be constituted under a wider and more comprehensive name, remains an open question. Only let it be a great National Society for meeting a great national evil.

Christianity, of all the great religions of the world, has alone proved itself able to effect the permanent elevation

of woman ; yet, strange and sad anomaly ! it is in Christian civilisations that, amidst the elevation of the many, is witnessed her deepest, most artificial, and systematic degradation by man, to which many a heathen nation would point with scorn and disgust. Surely the Church, which believes in the INCARNATION, that God sent forth His own Son, made of a woman, will cease to look supinely on her desecration, or to combat it only by the most inadequate and desultory means, but by the most powerful organization she can command will endeavour to arrest and stamp out this deadliest evil, and realise something of the divine ideal of womanhood, what the fact of the Incarnation has made it, consecrating it as the Divine Mother, to be the fountain of life, and love, and purity to the world.

ELLICE HOPKINS.

A PLEA FOR THE WIDER ACTION

OF

The Church of England,

&c.

I SUPPOSE we are all aware of the extreme gravity of the evil which we meet to-day, in the presence of our Redeemer, to consider; and to grapple with which the Church Penitentiary Association exists. I presume we should be all agreed, that while most of our other great moral evils may be contemplated as diseases of the extremities, this moral evil, as touching home, family, marriage, all those life-giving functions of our nature which make us akin to God Himself, as the parents of beings formed in His image and heirs of immortality,—this is no disease of the extremities, it is a disease at the very heart of life, poisoning life at its very source.

I conclude also that we are not only aware of its deep gravity, but of its appalling magnitude, and its tendency to increase as civilised life presents more and more complicated conditions of society. We are all aware that at the heart of all our great Christian civilisations there has grown up an immense outcast class of helpless women, and still more helpless children. I am not at all sure that we do

realize the numbers of this class. Père Hyacinthe stated in St. James's Hall, that in Paris alone there are 150,000 of these moral outcasts. Say that this is an exaggeration, yet how tremendous must be the evil of which such an exaggeration is possible from a man of such high authority and so intimately acquainted with Paris ! The lowest estimate I can get from any practical worker in London is 20,000 ; Mr. Acton places it as high as 80,000. I can only say from personal knowledge that the state of London is appalling ; that there are streets on streets, and courts on courts, inhabited almost exclusively by outcast women and girls—thresholds, as a rule, crossed by no Christian foot ; streets on streets, and courts on courts, where young children swarm who *know everything*, many of them growing up in houses of ill-fame, and forced, under the compulsory powers of the Educational Acts, to attend school, to the grievous corruption of other children. Nor need I dwell on the misery and degradation of these outcasts ; that whatever fatal hold their mode of life gets over them, there is not one of that vast multitude of our lost sisters that can bear her misery and degradation without deadening it by intoxicants. ‘But for the drink we could not bear our life,’ they all say. Nor, again, need I dwell on the terrible physical scourge which awaits so many of them, in which the grave seems literally to invade our life, and, in living corruption, to cry, ‘The wages of sin is death.’ This assembly being chiefly composed of practical workers, I may take for granted that we are painfully familiar with these terrible facts, as well as with the wide-spread poisoning of our national health, the increase of insanity, the suffering of innocent infants and wives, and all the black harvest which results from such a fearful sowing.

And our children, surely we realize the terrible facts with regard to them? Not only does the English law recognise that a woman comes of age, at the age of *thirteen*, for the purposes of vice,—in other words, that if a little bird-witted child of thirteen consents to be ruined for life, the law throws on that moral baby the responsibility, and the man who has betrayed a child escapes scot-free,—but at any age a little English girl can drift into this living grave, before she is old enough to understand the consequences of her actions. A little girl of thirteen, honestly earning her 1s. 6d. a-week, was going down one of our Brighton streets, when she was met by the keeper of a bad house. The child was pretty; the wretched woman saw she was a marketable article. ‘I wouldn’t work so hard, if I were you,’ she said, ‘for a miserable 1s. 6d.; you come along with me, and I’ll show you how to get silk dresses and smart bonnets, and take you to the theatre, all for no work at all.’ *The child went.* Two days after she crept back in the early dawn to her mother, and her mother brought her up to us, a *prostituted baby*. And we had no legal redress; there was neither conspiracy nor fraud. We could not go and make it felony in that woman to have harboured such a child for such a purpose.

But it is not only the children of the poor that are perishing through our English *laissez-faire*. Some of us realize but too painfully the grave moral evils that our public schools present, and to which so many of our boys fall victims,—evils which our high-minded schoolmasters are doing their best to combat, with as yet imperfect success, because the whole question is shirked in the Christian home.

And, lastly, do we realize the state of public opinion

which underlies and supports these terrible facts—that the majority of men, many of them good Christian men, hold the necessity of the existence of this outcast class in a civilised country, where marriage is delayed; the necessity of this wholesale sacrifice of women in body and soul? So little has the Christian Church hitherto effected in educating Christian consciousness on this vital question, that I doubt whether the mass of men are at all in advance of the Zulu chief whom the Government was anxious to ingratiate; and having racked their brains to think of what would please him most, they sent him at last a present of waggons and wheelbarrows. He gazed at them with fine scorn. ‘What’s the use of those things,’ he said, ‘to bear our burdens, whilst we have plenty of women?’ ‘What’s the use,’ says the British Zulu, the average Englishman, ‘of our bearing the burden of self-control which civilised life throws on us, whilst *we have plenty of women?*’ ‘What recks it that weak women are crushed and cursed and degraded, as long as we strong men find life the easier and pleasanter?’

But when we turn from the complex magnitude of the evil with a sort of despairing cry for help to the Church of the living God, to that pure and Apostolic branch of it to which we belong, to the Church of England, which does recognise that great special evils must be met with great special agencies—which in her Temperance Society is taking the van in the fight with our national intemperance—what do we find? We find, indeed, the Church Penitentiary Association, a body called into existence to meet this yet graver ill. But what does it offer? A single specific, like a Russian physician going forth to meet the ‘black death’ with a single globule; and that specific professedly a palliative and not a cure—Penitentiaries.

Penitentiaries, of which one of its most intelligent and devoted members said in the Diocesan Conference of Winchester, that we might at least have the satisfaction of feeling that they went to the root of the evil, when they only cure the evil after it is done, when they only touch women, and leave the real vital factor, *the man*, untouched, and only save women in infinitesimal numbers.

But even this narrow basis on which to meet a world-wide evil must be further narrowed down. The Church Penitentiary Association confessedly and knowingly, by the constitution it adopts, excludes what I make bold to call the most successful Penitentiary in England—at least, if you challenge that assertion, the one which is exercising the most profound influence on the Penitentiary work of England—the Albion Hill Home of Brighton; a Church Penitentiary, with a Clergyman of the Established Church as its chaplain, with a Committee of Churchmen, with a loyal daughter of the Church of England at its head, but excluded by the organ of the Church to which it belongs, because it recognises that ‘self-devoted women’ can be found among dependent working women as well as among independent ladies; and because, in return for the priceless labour of love they give, which only the Master’s ‘Well done!’ can recompense, it recognises the Scriptural principle, on which every endowed Church rests, that ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire.’

Why, I ask, should one system exclude the other? Is there not room for both, for Training Homes worked by self-devoted sisters, and for Training Homes worked by a lady-superintendent and self-devoted working women, who, as having no independent means, must of course be paid? You cannot urge that the first alone produce good results,

because the best results of all have been produced on exactly the opposite system. Why not let us be true to the great Church principle of recognising 'diversity of operations,' guided by the same spirit of love to our Master and the souls He died to save ?

But waiving this narrower issue, let me return to the wider one which I have raised, and which I have so much more deeply at heart. Why should not the Church Penitentiary Association become the representative of the Church of the Living God, with the full tide of her glorious life flowing in its veins? Why should it not take its place by the side of the Church of England Temperance Society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Christian Knowledge Society, and so show our Church as presenting a solid front against all the powers of darkness, against intemperance, heathenism, ignorance, and vice? By what evil fate are we condemned for ever to be picking up the dead leaves off this deadly upas tree, and never to aim a blow at the root? If the good and holy men who formed this Association suggested, rightly and wisely, the formation of Penitentiaries as the first step to take, did they mean us never to take a second and more advanced step? Did they really wish, or intend us to be, for ever bandaging up our living limbs with cerements from their graves, so that from dealing with results we cannot go on to attack causes, perpetually pleading the constitution they imposed on us as a reason why we cannot do the progressive work they would have been the first to urge on us, had they lived and shared in the growth that belongs to all true work? Suffer me to use a very disagreeable, but still very helpful, analogy — the treatment of an abscess by a quack and by a physician.

The quack's only thought is to cure results; he sees a nasty looking sore, and his only idea is to heal that; so he claps his patent plaster on it, and never gives a thought to the aggravated cause which he has done nothing to cure. The physician, on the contrary, takes the surface sore as his guide, sees at once that nature is endeavouring by it to eliminate some dead constituent, and proceeds to give his whole attention to the irritating cause that is keeping up the abscess, be it a bit of decayed bone, or some poisonous matter, or what it may. Which method do we mean to adopt, the quack's or the physician's? The quack who palliates results, or the physician who cures the cause? Penitentiaries are doubtless necessary palliatives, but I urge that when advanced, not as a temporary palliative, but as a sole specific, the Church in so doing indirectly ministers to the evil cause, tacitly acknowledges with the British Zulu the necessity of prostitution, and contents herself with saving as many victims of a necessary evil as she can.

What, then, is the wider action, the true moral therapeutics, the curing from within instead of patching from without, the striking at causes rather than tinkering at results, that I would venture to urge on the Church Penitentiary Association as an existing Church organization for dealing with this vital problem?

1st.—The broadening out of its Penitentiary basis, so as to take in all good and thorough Church work in training. On this I have already sufficiently dwelt.

2nd.—The appointment of travelling Clerical Secretaries, similar to the Secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society. Let the Secretary appointed be a good preacher, a wise and understanding man, and a moderate Churchman, whose province it would be to stir up and

organize work in the various dioceses ; to urge the formation of Cottage Training Homes for the wants of each diocese—only sixteen out of the thirty-two dioceses having Penitentiaries in connexion with the C. P. A. ; to preach in the various churches, and get offertories ; personally to bring the magnitude of the evil before the clergy, and get them to deal more plainly with this vital question, at least in their Confirmation classes—I believe, if once the example were set by a practised preacher of how to put things so as not to harm the young girls of a congregation, many would deal with it from the pulpit as well, instead of shirking the whole subject, as the mass of the clergy outside the High-Church party do at present ; to influence, directly or indirectly, the municipal authorities to put in force the laws for securing the decency of the streets—our streets at present being simply peripatetic schools of vice for our youth, the shame and disgrace of our nation ; to urge the formation of lock-wards under careful moral supervision in connexion with all our general Hospitals, the only available cure for women to be had at Workhouse Infirmaries being of a most dangerously imperfect kind ;* in places where prostitution is peculiarly rife, to hold meetings for men only, and endeavour to rouse them to some sense of manliness, of the shame of this cowardly vice, the curse of which falls so almost entirely on the woman, and to form, if

* In garrison towns where the C. D. A. is not in force, or on the repeal of that legislation, which, with such representative minds as Frederic Denison Maurice, James Martineau, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer ranged against it, can only be a question of time, the patient on admission might be required to sign a paper, consenting to remain as long as the surgeon sees necessary, compulsory powers being obtained for enforcing, if necessary, the agreement. This would meet a grave sanitary difficulty, without having recourse to measures which strike many as immoral, unjust, and unconstitutional.

possible, brotherhoods or guilds for combating it ; to urge the formation of those specific means for arresting the evil : Girls' Friendly Societies, Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls, Free Registry Offices, Training Schools, Factory-girls' Club-rooms and Lodging-houses, &c. : in fact, to work in those ever-varying ways which in the one work of educating Christian consciousness he would find flowing into his hands. We have got rid but too surely of all that is high and noble in asceticism ; but it seems to me that we have still to make a vigorous effort to shake ourselves loose from what I should call the dregs of asceticism—the sense that our bodies are more or less the seat of evil, that there is something low and shameful about some of their highest functions, which leads the British parent to make a conscience of ignoring the whole subject, and to send his boy to a public school without the most ordinary knowledge of the laws of his own body or its relation to the world he lives in, and to leave the most powerful elements for moral weal or woe in our nature to the guidance of chance and impure gossip. The Christian Church has yet got frankly to receive the teaching of modern science, that this 'matter' which we have been accustomed to call 'brute,' 'gross,' 'dead,' is a ceaseless activity, a glory and a wonder only second to the reasonable soul itself ; to recognise the material part of us as a far more vital factor in the divine life than she at present does ; to teach with far more emphasis that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and train us in that habitual reverence for our body which would make us recognise its functions as sacramental, the visible sign and token of the high purpose and meaning from which they are not to be divorced without our incurring for ourselves and for others 'sundry kinds of death.'

There is one agency which it might be possible for your Secretary to set on foot, on which I have already touched, and for which my inmost soul yearns. Would it not be possible to band young men together in some sort of brotherhood, or society, or guild, for the protection of women and children from prostitution and degradation—to give them a more aggressive form of purity, something higher and more vivifying than taking care of their own virtue, that manly, militant virtue which grows strong in fighting the battle of God for the weak and defenceless, the lower passions cast out by the higher passion? Mere self-restraint will never fight this battle. Passion must cast out passion. You want an enthusiasm to lift a young man above himself. What I crave is some agency that would infuse into young men a good, strong, passionate sense of the pitiful meanness of it all; the utter unmanliness of crushing and degrading women, inflicting a curse which they do not share with so much as their little finger; going back to their own jolly lives, their pleasant homes, their friends, their career, their power of marrying; and leaving the unhappy girl to become an outcast, cutting *her* off from ever being an honourable wife and mother, exposing her to a hideous disease, dooming her to live a degraded life and die a Godless, Christless, hopeless death! If we could get the feeling into them of what, in their own rough language, they would call ‘the beastly shame’ of it all! A single stroke of active work will wake a young man up to this side of the question: the literally *untemptable* men are the men who have been actively engaged, not in taking care of their own virtue, but, in one way or the other, in saving women. Would it not be possible, with care and circumspection, to form in our large towns bands

of strong young 'knights of God,' bound to work for the cause of womanhood in various ways, and in communication with wise Christian women, who would undertake any part of the work which it might not be expedient for them to carry out ?

To pass on to the third point, on which I need not detain you so long. Let every Penitentiary be the nucleus of recognised work outside itself. Here I stand as firm as a rock. As long as masses of young girls are practically abandoned in the midst of our Christian civilisation, you may build any number of Penitentiaries, but the whole evil will go on. Nothing short of our going personally amongst them, as our Lord Jesus Christ came personally amongst us, will avail. Let Ladies' Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls be formed in all our large towns. Let some such Association be as much a recognised part of a Penitentiary as its work of training those who are rescued. Let it be the work of some of the Associates to visit, befriend, and mother these girls in the vile precincts where they herd. Do not let us be content with picking up the last link, but let us strike at the forge where all the links are being fabricated. Such work will form the most powerful protest to men that we simply will not recognise a class of our own sisters, the helpless children of the poor, set apart for destruction of body and soul. You know our work in Brighton;* how, in one street alone, we have shut seven of those houses; and other streets have been completely purged. I am thankful to be able to say that, in the course of little more than a year, Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, London, Edinburgh, Torquay, Cheltenham, Southampton, Winchester, Bedford, Dundee, Perth, &c.,

* See *Work in Brighton*. 15th Thousand. Price 6d. (Hatchards.)

are following our example, and forming Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls. Should a great Church organization be set in operation for attacking prostitution from the root, I would thankfully hold myself in readiness to start Associations in any place where the Secretary considered there was an opening, since it might be difficult work for a gentleman to organize.

But, besides the work of visitation and rescue, these Associations do a good deal of preventive work. We hunt up little girls, just past the School Board age, the conditions of whose homes are so bad as, more or less, to set them apart for a terrible, nameless fate, some of them being actually brought up at houses of ill-fame—a contingency *for dealing with which no provision is made whatever in the Educational Acts*. By their agency you can remove a boy who is in certain danger of being brought up a thief; you cannot remove a girl who is in certain danger of being brought up a prostitute—though the one only grows up to filch money, the other grows up to filch money, virtue, and health all at once. In one case we tried, through the School Board, to rescue a little girl living in a bad house, and *attending school from thence*; in conjunction with the School Board officer we worked the various clauses of the Industrial School Act backward and forward, but found we could not touch the case. We had to rescue her through our own private resources; and when we fetched her away, we found her in a room with three men and her own mother—*all drunk*. One of the first steps of an influential Church agency should be to get this omission in Clause 14 of the Industrial Schools Act remedied, if it be but for the sake of the children of the respectable poor who attend our schools. It could be done by simply adding to the

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That is found Destitute, either being an Orphan or having a surviving Parent who is undergoing Penal Servitude or Imprisonment ;

That frequents the Company of reputed Thieves.

paragraph, 'Any child that frequents the company of reputed thieves,' the words 'or prostitutes.' Let us prove that the chastity of our little girls is at least as dear to us as the security of property.

Such children as these we get away from their evil surroundings to Training Schools during the two most difficult years of a girl's life—fourteen to sixteen. Most of these dear children are saved before any mischief befalls them; and even when not so, it does not leave the same indelible brand as adult sin. Take another instance from our Brighton work. A child of twelve, called 'the devil,' having been twice in hospital from vice, was acting as a regular 'decoy-duck' for some of our low publicans, to entice girls into the public-house, where they were drugged and ruined. I ask, What *is* the use of our leaving a regular manufactory of fallen womanhood in full play, and burdening ourselves with Penitentiaries to *accommodate the results*? Were it not better, by personal effort and loving care, to shut up the manufactory? The publicans are closely watched. The child has been sent to a Training School, and is doing well. In this way alone we could cut off a vast mass of the raw material out of which prostitution is made, and save multitudes of our young girls from passing into this living grave at all, and multitudes of young men from ever knowing them as their worst tempters. We also, in some places, open Free Registry Offices, Factory-girl Club-rooms, Training Homes; we distribute publications; and all our Associations alike are bound to influence women of our own rank, especially with regard to the training of their sons—a wide subject, on which I have no time to enter.*

* See *Work in Brighton* (Hatchards), page 49–55, where, however, the subject is necessarily very imperfectly and incidentally dealt with.

And now for my fourth and last suggestion. Should the Church Penitentiary Association become the organ of the Church in dealing vitally with this great question, why should it not make use of the powerful agency of the Press? How much might be done by the C. P. A.'s instrumentality in bringing to the notice of the clergy useful publications! Take, for instance, that wise and potent little tract, *A Word to Schoolmistresses*, published by Hatchards. Our National Schoolmistresses might do very much in this great question, and would do it if stimulated and urged from without.

Again, we have been holding a Conference of poor mothers, and hope to issue a little paper, to be worked periodically through 'Mothers' Meetings,' on the early training of our boys and girls in habits of modesty and decency, much of this terrible evil originating in immodest sleeping arrangements and immodest habits generally. What a material help it would be if we Churchwomen might look to you to disseminate among our clergy, and their wives especially, anything wise and to the point which we may be able to write! Once again, is there not a crying want of a wise and authoritative physiological guide to a young man, stating the facts about his own body and the relations of that body to the world in which he lives; a book that a father or a widowed mother could put into his or her son's hands before sending him to school or college? Knowledge of some kind he will have. Our only choice lies in whether he shall have that knowledge in a pure, unemotional, scientific form, or whether he shall get it in the form of impure, false, and stimulating gossip, by which the mind and conscience are too often permanently defiled. Surely an Association like this might be able to induce some well-known physician—Dr. Routh, or Dr. Andrew

Clarke, or some other physiologist, who recognises the unity of the moral and physical laws—to provide such a guide? Nature is profoundly moral, but through ignorance young men too often find this out by her punishments rather than by her priceless blessings.

In conclusion, perhaps you will say, in urging this wider and deeper action on the C. P. A., I am as one who should urge on the National Life-boat Association the duty of teaching swimming, since then life-boats might be less needed; when, of course, they would make answer that they were instituted, not to teach swimming but to provide life-boats. On one point I accept the analogy. Yours is, indeed, a life-boat, for the want of which whole nations as well as individuals have been wrecked. But I urge that this life-boat never reaches the wreck at all; that hundreds of men and women are going down into this bitter sea, that never gives up its dead, for the want of the help you could give them; while the men who man her keep on pleading that their constitution forbids them to put out on that dark and stormy sea, or do aught but pick up the few women who may chance to be washed ashore, and see, if possible, to their being brought to life.

But surely, surely, having passed in review all that might be done by a powerful Church Organization, all that cries, and wails, and groans to be done, and seeing that as yet we have only taken the first step, we shall not stay where we are, but say with one voice and with one heart with our Divine Master, and those who have gone before, 'Arise, let us go hence,' to 'build again this tabernacle which has fallen down,' the ruins of that body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

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